Public Health
Seattle & King County

OSS Work Group Meeting
Tuesday, April 26 2016, 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM
Environmental Health Services, 14350 SE Eastgate Way, Bellevue, WA 98007

Introductions, Convene & Housekeeping (Jay Watson, facilitator)

Jay welcomed Work Group members and prefaced that this meeting would attempt to establish a knowledge foundation for decision making at the May meeting. Paper copies of the March meeting materials were distributed. Jay asked everyone to look at the draft March meeting summary and offer changes or corrections if needed. No changes were proposed. Workgroup members were also offered an opportunity to ask general questions about the March meeting.

Work Group Member Comments and Questions:

Q: Questions were asked about a possible new fee that was referenced at the March meeting and why King County is focused on program financing at this time.

A: Changes in funding sources for OSS Programs and a desire by elected officials to find other ways to fund programs than taxes, resulted in WA Dept. of Health convening a Puget Sound Septic Finance Committee in 2014 to explore program financing options. Representatives from the 12 Puget Sound health jurisdictions convened to discuss their programs and their inability to oversee OSS as required by state law because of inadequacies in the amount and predictability of funding for their programs.

After meeting for nearly a year, that process recommended that a small annual fee be charged to each OSS owner to ensure that local health jurisdictions' programs were funded adequately and to ensure compliance with state laws and rules. State legislation requiring that fee be charged in each of the 12 Puget Sound Counties was proposed but not passed.

Currently Whatcom, San Juan and Clark Counties are charging a flat annual fee to fund their OSS programs. Thurston County's Board of Health is currently considering this funding mechanism. King County has discussed it internally, but no formal proposal has been made to the King County Board of Health. Currently, no hearings have been scheduled.

The Puget Sound Septic Finance Committee's work and recommendations are on a WA Dept. of Health website at:
http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/WastewaterManagement/OnsiteSewageSystemsOSS/SepticFinancingAdvisoryCommittee.

Q: There were questions about whish agency manages what types of systems, OSS, large onsite systems and municipal sewers.

A: Local health jurisdictions (LHJs) in each county manage OSS within their counties; large onsite sewage systems (LOSS) that treat between 3,500 and 100,000 gallons per day are under the jurisdiction of the WA Dept. of Health (DOH); systems that treat over 100,000 gallons per day/municipal sewer systems are under the jurisdiction of WA Dept. of Ecology (Ecology).

Q: A question was raised about the need for additional requirements for any of those systems.

A: It was noted again that DOH regulates LOSS, but they do not inspect the collection (STEP) system between the individual home and the treatment system and there is a gap in oversight there.

Possible Recommendation: Public Health should require individual homeowners with STEP systems to obtain inspections annually and at time of sale.

Presentations (Jay Watson, Facilitator)

Jay introduced the series of PowerPoint presentations and what would be covered in them by Lynn Schneider, PH OSS Program; Dave Garland, WA Dept. of Ecology; and Doug Navetski, King County Storm Water Services. He said the presentations would be posted on the OSS plan update webpage, as well as printed and distributed for inclusion in Work Group Members' binders.

What is Pollution? (Lynn Schneider, PH OSS Program)

Lynn opened the presentation by giving a brief overview of the definition of pollution, describing how a septic system can impact water quality and ultimately public health. Lynn reviewed the various physical, biological and chemical elements that make up the pollutant category, focusing on how biological pollution (pathogens, viruses and bacteria) make their way into water systems, comprising the majority of groundwater contamination.

What is Water Quality? (Dave Garland, WA Dept. of Ecology)

Next, Dave reviewed how water quality problems are identified, found and fixed. He went over the historical and legal frameworks that have impacted the administration of water quality management, briefly reviewing the Federal Clean Water Act, as well as the State Water Pollution Control Act (RCW 90.48). He went over water quality mapping, as well as how TMDL (total maximum daily load) is used to "budget" pollution and implement water quality improvement processes. Other ways used to track water quality problems include random inspections, special watershed initiatives and follow-up to environmental complaints.

Finding Water Quality Problems. (Dave Garland, King County Stormwater Services)

Doug Navetski then reviewed exposure and biological processes that lead to pollutants entering water systems, focusing on fecal coliform. Fecal Coliform, he explained, is an indicator pollutant of disease organisms that may be present in the water, and that their presence could be an indicator of improperly disposed waste. He reviewed the anoxia chain, describing how certain pollutants can cause nutritional deficits. He reviewed some of the pollutant pathways, describing how wild animals, commercial/hobby livestock and domestic animals can spread and contribute bacteria to water systems. However, from an exposure potential, Doug said that the greatest disease risk stems from human sources, which can spread fatal, viral diseases. Doug reviewed the various, currently used, monitoring processes/programs. He then talked about the recent downgrade of the Poverty Bay area near Federal Way.

Work Group Member Comments and Questions:

Q: Can the general public buy fecal coliform test kits?

A: Yes, they can be purchased privately. King County Stormwater Services has also run community efforts to get help from the public to collect samples with test kits. Public Health did this many years ago, but does not have the funding to do it now. Public Health does do some direct testing, but only in areas with clear OSS failures, such as in the Marine Recovery Area on Vashon – again because of funding limitations.

Q: Does an OSS have a designed life?

A: An OSS could fail early or last many years, depending on a variety of factors, so each case is different. It also depends on how well they are maintained and what is disposed of in them. A goal of the OSS Program is to encourage proper O&M to ensure that they last as long as possible because of the high cost of repair/replacement.

Onsite Sewage System Program (Lynn Schneider, PH OSS Program)

Lynn gave an overview of the components of a comprehensive OSS management program, and reiterated her desire to help homeowners faced with OSS challenges. She explained how if all these elements were fully funded, an OSS program could reduce costly OSS failures while also reducing the need for costly sewer system tie-ins. Lynn reminded the Work Group that she would be looking to them also evaluate how to best utilize resources within the OSS program.

Work Group Member Comments and Questions:

Q: What is the cost of a new septic system or replacement?

A: It varies by site, but averages for conventional/gravity systems are running between $15,000 and $20,000.

Prioritization Questions (Jay Watson, Facilitator)

Following up on Lynn's presentation of the OSS program components, Jay asked the group what information they might need to begin the discussion about allocating Public Health work efforts and resources across all possible program components.

Work Group Member Comments and Questions:

Work Group members discussed a number of types of information that they thought might be useful to them in making resource allocation recommendations. They included:

- Number and location of OSS;
- Condition of those OSS;
- Demographic information about the owners/occupants of those homes with OSS;
- O&M information and trends;
- Number of failures;
- OSS Program budget/expenditure information;
- Areas that are impacted by failures (shellfish growing areas, public swimming beaches, endangered salmon, etc.).

C: Currently, homeowners are responsible for reporting when an OSS is serviced, but there is no requirement to turn in inspection reports. A program to make sure every OSS in the county is being maintained every 3 years would be cost prohibitive, as opposed to a prioritized effort.

A: Pumpers are required to turn in pump reports, but many are turned in as paper documents and must be entered into the PH database.

Possible Recommendation: Pumpers could be required to file their reports electronically, and Public Health should make that method as easily accessible/user friendly as possible.

Q: Could fees be charged to OSS owners who don't get their systems inspected regularly?

A: That is a possibility, if an OSS owner is current with inspections, they could pay a discounted rate.

Q: Education/outreach is important. Can PH partner with other groups?

A: Working with communities in small groups would be ideal, but it is time intensive and very costly and the Program must address 88,000 systems, so prioritizing is important.

Q: How could barriers to annexation be removed with regard to OSS? Annexations might not be resisted as much if individuals with OSS could keep their systems and did not fear being forced to tie-in to sewer systems.

A: We will need more conversation on this issue before a recommendation could be developed.

Public Comments

Jay asked if there were any other comments or questions from those present. No additional comments were offered.

Meeting Recap (Jay Watson)

A few possible recommendations were raised during Work Group discussions:

A.) Public Health should require individual homeowners with STEP systems to obtain inspections annually and at time of sale.

B.) Pumpers could be required to file their reports electronically, and Public Health should make that method as easily accessible/user friendly as possible.

Lynn reminded the workgroup that what is being asking from them is recommendations for the OSS Program to include in the County's Plan update. Jay asked members to contact him if they have issues that should be raised at future meetings.

All meeting related materials would be posted on the OSS Plan Update webpage at: http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/wastewater/2016-oss-plan-update.aspx, as well as printed and provided to each Work Group member, for inclusion in their binders, at subsequent meetings. He also said that if Work Group members had ideas for additional presentation topics, they should contact him with those suggestions.

Meeting Attendees

Work Group Members:

- Tanya McFarlane, City of Redmond
- Robert Elwell, City of Auburn
- Deidre Finley, Black Diamond Gardens
- Cristofer Horbelt, Seattle Public Utilities
- David Crowell, Seattle-King Realtors Assn.
- Mary Jane Goss, Seattle-King Realtors Assn.
- Gwendolyn High, Community Alliance to Reach out and Engage
- Doug Navetski, King County DNRP-WLRD Stormwater
- George Streepy, G&N Septic Tank Service
- Trudy Rolla, Northshore Utility District
- Dave Garland, WA Dept. of Ecology
- Randy Freeby, WA Dept. of Health
- Alison Butcher, Master Builders Association.
- Rhys Sterling, Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council
- Joan Nolan, WA Dept. of Ecology

Staff & Contractors:

- Lynn Schneider, PH OSS Program
- Terri Jenkins-Mclean, PH OSS Program
- Doug Jones, PH OSS Program
- Jay Watson, EPM, LLC, Contract Facilitator
- Natasha Walker, Kellogg Consulting, Inc., Contract Meeting Recorder

Audience Members and Other Attendees:

- Julie West, PH